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# Southwest Conference UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

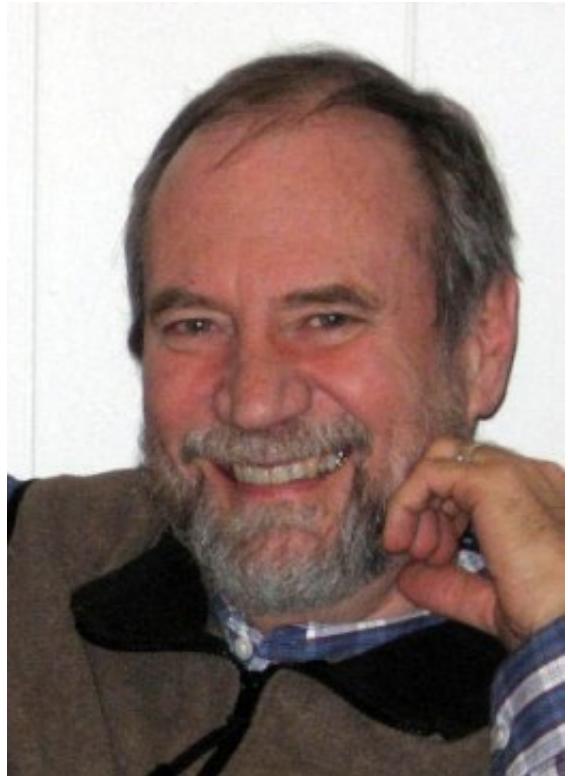
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## ICM Reflections – Leaving the Light On

It appears that I'm now past the half-way point of my interim work among you. Since I first left Montana on July 21 to begin my time with you, I have driven many miles and visited 30 of our SEC congregations plus 3 possible new settings. I most likely won't make it to all of our congregations, but by now I've experienced enough to have a basis for some general observations. I want to share some of these with you, but first I want to put them in context with this season of Advent and this special time in world history when we honor the legacy of Nelson Mandela.

I have always enjoyed one of the key rituals of Advent: the lighting of candles and the naming of the hopes these symbolize for us: The lighting of the first candle symbolizes expectation, the second symbolizes hope, the third joy and the fourth purity. The Christ candle is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day reminding Christians that Jesus is the light of the world. And when I think about that white candle I'm always reminded of the words from John 1: 4-5: *... in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* (NRSV)



From time to time in human history special people emerge who more than most embody the attributes which our Advent candles symbolize. The latest such person was Nelson Mandela, and you have no need I'm sure for me to describe the light that shined in his life – the news has been full of abundant deserved praise and comments. But the one thing I do want to share are some points that have been made by Andrew Young as he has reflected upon his personal friendship with Mandela in more than one response to media:

*... it's a mistake to look at former South African President Nelson Mandela as a political figure and forget how his strong religious beliefs sustained him...He was extremely well-educated. He was born and raised in the Methodist Church, by Methodist school, by Methodist missionaries. And he was a devout Christian who took his imprisonment very much like the Apostle Paul took his, as part of the trials and tribulations of leadership... (it is what led Mandela to believe) that you could only defeat apartheid through love and understanding.*

What Andrew Young has observed and what Nelson Mandela lived out is the essence of our hope each Advent...that the hope of the world is embodied in the gift we receive as the light of the world. As we live out that gift we do for others what President George H. Bush intended with his 1989 vision of a "thousand points of light" that invited the nation to take action through service to their fellow citizens. It is through such action that we accomplish what Tom Bodett ad-libbed for all of us in his famous line: "We'll leave the light on for you."

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